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### 23. INTERACTION BETWEEN COMMON SKINK *MABUYA CARINATA* AND JUNGLE CROW *CORVUS MACRORHYNCHOS*

One morning during September 1990 we observed an interesting interaction between a common skink *Mabuya carinata* and a jungle crow *Corvus macrorhynchos* over a food item. At about 1000 hrs we heard the frantic cries of a frog in our backyard at our residence in Malaparamba in Calicut. We came out for a closer look and found a skink holding a frog in its mouth. The skink had gripped the frog in the abdominal region and was apparently having some difficulty in swallowing it. The frog did not stop its cries and even after about 10 minutes the skink was unable to swallow it. We knew that we were

witnessing an unusual incident since the common skink more or less exclusively feeds on insects, and only occasionally takes small vertebrates (BOOK OF INDIAN REPTILES, Daniel, J.C. 1983). But a bigger surprise was in store for us. A jungle crow was soon attracted by the frog's cries and alighted on the compound wall nearby and observed the proceedings attentively. After some time the crow hopped down and before the skink could react, snatched the frog and flew away.

S. DEVASAHAYAM  
ANITA DEVASAHAYAM

October 22, 1990

### 24. SIGHTING OF THE ARBOREAL SKINK *DASIA HALIANA* AT MUNDANTHURAI WILDLIFE SANCTUARY, TAMIL NADU

The arboreal skink *Dasia haliana* (Nevill) is apparently rare. The species was recorded very recently on the banks of the river Tambiraparani in Mundanthurai Wildlife Sanctuary, Tamil Nadu (Joshua and Sekar 1985). Johnsingh (1986) also recorded the species in the same area.

At noon on 18 May 1990, during my visit to the gallery forest along the banks of the Servalar river in the Mundanthurai Wildlife Sanctuary, one of the guides who accompanied me spotted an arboreal skink. The reptile was moving very slowly in the forest canopy. When the guide tried to collect the skink for closer observation, it slid into a hole in a dead limb of a tree entangled in the canopy. The dead branch was carefully brought down and the skink taken out. It was released in the same place shortly, after measurements and photographs were taken. The total length, from nose tip to tail tip was 160 mm. Since the skink matched the description given by Smith (1935), the identity was confirmed as *Dasia haliana* (Nevill).

On enquiry, the local guides said that they had come across the skink near the Tambiraparani river and not near Servalar river. According to them the skink can usually be seen shortly after rains, which is when many reptiles are active.

Though the skink has been seen in the same general area within Mundanthurai Wildlife Sanctuary the present sighting is of interest as the animal was sighted on the banks of the Servalar river near the dormitory maintained by the Forest Department, nearly 0.5 km from the junction of the Tambiraparani and Servalar towards the Servalar dam. The claim of the local guides that the skink is known to occur over a much wider area needs to be investigated.

I wish to thank the local guides who accompanied on the trip and Dr S. Subramanya, University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore, for helping in preparing the text and for constant encouragement.

August 21, 1990 S. KARTHIKEYAN

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25. FOOD HABITS OF THE COMMON RAT-SNAKE *PTYAS MUCOSUS* LINN.

The dhaman or common rat-snake *Ptyas mucosus* Linn. is widely distributed in India. It is diurnal and commonly seen close to human habitation. Recorded food items are geckos, toads, frogs, young pond turtles, nestling birds, skinks, agamid lizards, bats and snakes (Daniel 1983).

On the way to Sariska Tiger Reserve from Delhi in November 1990, we found a rat-snake run over by a vehicle, close to Firozpur (Haryana). Head to tail tip length and body weight were 202 cm and 1500 g respectively. Whitaker (*JBNHS* 66(1): 185-186) reported that adults

averaged 180 to 210 cm in length with a maximum of 250 cm from a locality near Bombay. Daniel (THE BOOK OF INDIAN REPTILES, 1983) reports that most adult specimens are between 165 cm and 200 cm with a maximum of 352 cm. Examination of stomach contents revealed that the snake had swallowed two chicks of the blue-rock pigeon *Columba livia* weighing 43.3 and 49.0 gms and one soft-furred field rat *Rattus meltada* Gray weighing 55.5 gms, equivalent to 10% of the snake's body weight (Table 1).

December 7, 1990

S.P. GOYAL

TABLE I  
FOOD ITEMS OF RAT-SNAKE *Ptyas mucosus*

Food items	Characteristics
1. Two chicks of blue-rock pigeon <i>Columba livia</i>	Weight: 43.3 g and 49.0 g
2. Soft-furred field rat <i>Rattus meltada</i>	Weight: 55.5 g, male. External body measurements: Head and body: 129 mm, tail: 104 mm ear 21 mm, hind foot: 24 mm.

26. RANGE EXTENSION OF DUMERIL'S BLACKHEADED SNAKE  
*SIBYNOPHIS SUBPUNCTATUS* (DUM. & BIBR.)

On 15 March 1987, at Point Calimere, Thanjavur district, Tamil Nadu, a southern crow-pheasant *Centropus sinensis parroti* was noticed carrying a snake. Accidentally the snake slipped out of the crow-pheasant's beak and we collected it before it was picked up by the bird. The snake was later measured and identified as Dumeril's blackheaded snake *Sibynophis subpunctatus*. The snake was 40 cm in length. In current literature the distribution

is given as south-west, central and north-east India (COMMON INDIAN SNAKES, Whitaker, R. 1978). This record indicates that its distribution ranges up to south-east India.

We are thankful to A. Gnanasekar of the Bombay Natural History Society, for his help in identifying the snake.

May 6, 1990

V. NATARAJAN  
S. ALAGAR RAJAN

27. EXTENSION OF RANGE OF THE BLACK COBRA *NAJA NAJA OXIANA*

On 10 December 1990 at about 1000 hrs one of our bird trappers who was trapping raptors in the scrubland around the Dhandh, in Kutch district, Gujarat, rushed back to camp to inform us that a black cobra *Naja naja* had attacked another snake and was devouring it. We went to the site immediately but the cobra had already eaten the snake and withdrawn into a hole. On being disturbed, the cobra rushed out of its hole and regurgitated its freshly swallowed prey.

The cobra lacked the ocellations and was uniformly black. Its lack of patterns was clearly visible as it hissed violently and spread its hood. It soon disappeared into a nearby hole, leaving its regurgitated prey behind. We col-

lected the specimen and identified it as a saw scaled viper *Echis carinatus*. Its biometrics were as follows:

Total body length 780.5 mm; tail length 80 mm; weight 305 g.

According to Smith (FAUNA OF BRITISH INDIA, 1843) the black cobra occurs in Punjab and Kashmir. Whitaker (COMMON INDIAN SNAKES, 1978) mentions it as occurring in north-west India. The present record of the black cobra in Chhari Dhandh in Kutch extends the range of this subspecies.

November 16, 1990

S. ASAD AKHTAR  
J.K. TIWARI